

# Sermon Note: Expectations & Affirmations

## Baptism of the Lord

### Introduction

As we look ahead to Sunday's worship, we consider what it means to step into our identity and purpose. At times, we find ourselves caught between expectations—our own, those of others, or even what we think God expects of us—and affirmations of who we already are and who we are becoming. These tensions are nothing new. Even as we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, we see moments of expectation and affirmation intertwining, setting the stage for the work to come.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbFkDGCU2Ak>

*Note: This video includes the full movie trailer after the intended clip. Pause at 1:55 to skip... unless you want to watch it!*

In this clip from *Moana* (2016), Moana discovers her ancestors were voyagers and begins to understand her purpose as Gramma Tala affirms her calling.

### Why This Video?

This scene highlights Moana's realization that her ancestors were voyagers and her growing awareness that she, too, may have a larger purpose. Gramma Tala affirms what Moana has already begun to sense—that the ocean chose her for a reason. Yet Moana still wrestles with doubts about whether she is capable of fulfilling this calling. This tension mirrors the way we often wrestle with our own sense of purpose, especially when it feels bigger than we think we can handle. The encouragement Moana receives reminds us that affirmations—whether from others or from God—can give us the courage to step forward, even when we aren't entirely sure where the journey will lead.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. How does Moana's discovery about her ancestors help her begin to see her identity and purpose differently?
2. What role does Gramma Tala's affirmation play in Moana's decision to move forward?
3. Have you ever felt a sense of calling or purpose but struggled to believe you were ready for it? What helped you take the next step?
4. In what ways does Gramma Tala balance both storytelling and encouragement to help Moana?
5. How does this scene reflect the role of mentors or encouragers in helping us pursue our callings?
6. What similarities do you see between Moana's uncertainty and the ways we sometimes question our own readiness to follow God's calling?
7. What role does courage play in following a purpose, especially when the path forward isn't entirely clear?
8. How might we affirm others in our lives who are exploring their callings or struggling with doubts?

## **Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSVue)**

<sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>21</sup>Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

### **Scripture Discussion Questions**

1. What were the people wondering about John the Baptist in Luke 3:15?
2. What did John say he baptized with, and what did he say Jesus would baptize with?
3. What significant event happened when Jesus was baptized?
4. How do you discern your own calling and mission? What criteria help you evaluate whether you are following God’s will?
5. One theologian writes, “Baptism doesn’t mean safety or security... It means presence. It means community.” What will you do this week to live out the assurance that God is with you?

### **Additional (Optional) Questions**

The full Lectionary selection for this Sunday is Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 29, Acts 8:14-17, and Luke 3:15-17, 21-22. Each text includes images of water, the symbol of baptism. Isaiah focuses on God’s presence during the rough waters of life; the psalmist focuses on God’s majesty over water and other forces of nature. Luke’s words, in both Acts of the Apostles and the third Gospel, center on the act of baptism. In Acts, Peter and John connect the power of the Holy Spirit with the newly baptized. In Luke, John tells those being baptized that Jesus will bring the Holy Spirit to them, but we don’t get more detail.

1. Do you think John baptized Jesus by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling?
2. Considering the imagery in these passages, how does water symbolize God’s presence, cleansing, and transformation? What does this symbolism mean to you personally?
3. Discuss with a family member or trusted spiritual partner: How has baptism shaped your understanding of faith and community?

### **Weekly Action**

If you can remember it, think about when you were baptized. If you were young enough that you can’t remember, think about times you’ve seen others baptized. Consider writing a letter to yourself, affirming your identity as God’s beloved and outlining how you can live out this affirmation in your daily life.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank you for the powerful reminder that you are always with us. As we reflect on Jesus’ baptism and the affirmation of your love, help us embrace our identity as your beloved children. Guide us to live out your love in our daily lives and to support one another in our journeys. Amen.

*Disclosure: This Sermon Note was created by LJUMC staff with the support of AI tools.*